

VZCZCXYZ0000
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHEG #1149/01 1600757
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 080757Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9459
INFO RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 001149

SIPDIS

NEA/PI FOR KIRBY
NSC STAFF FOR PASCUAL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/05/2018
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KMPI](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: DEMARCHE REGARDING EGYPTIAN BLOGGERS DELIVERED

REF: SECSTATE 58249

Classified By: Ambassador Margaret Scobey for reason 1.4(B).

Pressing for Intellectual Freedom in Egypt

1.(C) On June 5, we delivered reftel demarche regarding imprisoned bloggers and, more generally, freedom of expression in Egypt to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Deputy Assistant Minister for Human Rights, Wael Aboulmagd. In addition to the general message regarding freedom of expression, we specifically raised the cases referred to in reftel; Kareem El Beheiri - who Egyptian authorities released, without charges, on Sunday June 1 - and imprisoned blogger Abdel Kareem Soliman. We also raised the case of Mohamed Maree, an Egyptian translator who was arrested on April 11 while working with American photo-journalist James Buck, who was also detained but quickly released.

2.(C) Aboulmagd replied that Egypt has not developed specific laws to address bloggers and other forms of "new" media. Instead, he said that Egypt handles such cases under traditional libel and slander laws, which can include criminal penalties. Using the case of Abdel Kareem Soliman - currently serving a four year prison sentence after being convicted in February 2007 of "denigrating Islam" and defaming President Mubarak - as an example, Aboulmagd said that Soliman had written in his blog that "the Prophet was a dog" and the "Prophet had raped children." This is extremely provocative in the Egyptian context, equivalent he said to racial or anti-Semitic epitaphs in the U.S. It is also illegal under Egyptian law and the fact that it was made on a blog, as opposed to traditional media, offers no protection. Aboulmagd added that Soliman had been afforded due process and that "the majority of Egyptians" agreed with the law under which Soliman was convicted.

3.(C) Turning to the case of El Beheri, Aboulmagd confirmed reports that Egyptian authorities released him on June 1, without charges. Aboulmagd offered no explanation for El Beheri's detention or release. According to media reports, police arrested El Beheri, a textile factory worker in the Egyptian Delta city of Mahalla who has blogged about labor issues, on April 7.

4.(C) Egyptian security services arrested Mohamed Maree on April 10 while he was working as a translator for American photo-journalist James Buck in Mahalla. Buck was also briefly detained. According to Aboulmagd, Maree is being held under the Emergency Law. He said that he had received inquiries about Maree's case from the Egyptian Embassy in Washington and was looking into the matter. Aboulmagd said he does not expect Maree to be held much longer.

Engagment with New Media

5.(C) Comment: We are actively engaged with Egypt's new media community and meet regularly with a range of activists and bloggers. Egyptian bloggers, including Noura Younis, Samuel Tadros and Wael Abbas have all participated in MEPI-funded exchange programs which have allowed them to visit the U.S. and network with other new media activists. We encourage MEPI to continue to fund such activities, and also to consider including Egyptian bloggers in its regional new media-related programs. Last year, we funded the start-up costs for an internet radio station operated by an Egyptian human rights advocacy group. We recently developed a USAID-funded program, through the American University in Cairo, that will send a group of Egyptian bloggers to the U.S. to cover the Presidential elections. We will continue overall Mission engagement with this growing new community of activists as well as continue to raise the cases of detained bloggers - including Soliman and North Sinai Bedouin blogger Abu Fagr - with the GoE.

6.(C) Comment continued: In addition, the Ambassador and other Mission members will continue to engage senior Egyptian officials in quiet conversation to outline our concerns over freedom of expression and the use of the Emergency Law to suppress legitimate political speech. We have found that, in these circumstances, our Egyptian interlocutors are open to discussion on the relative merits of each case and recognize when the security services or courts have overstepped. Regrettably, there is uniform agreement that the blogger Soliman far exceeded acceptable boundaries in his attack on Islam. End comment.

SCOBey